

“There’s no way to raise a family on \$15.06 an hour”

UAW-GM deal sanctions exploitation of temporary workers

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In addition to sharply increasing the numbers of low-paid “tier-two” workers in US auto factories, the tentative four-year deal between General Motors and the United Auto Workers sanctions the continued use of thousands of temporary workers who have no job security, health care or workplace rights but are nevertheless compelled to pay dues to the UAW.

The auto companies’ use of temporary workers, originally hired to fill in for vacationing full-time workers during the summer changeover period, has greatly expanded over the last decade and the latter now constitute at least 5 percent of the workforce, according to industry analysts. The Detroit-based automakers are striving to catch up to the level of the Asian and European-owned factories in the southern US states where 10 percent or more are temps.

The auto companies use these workers to fill in for any job when production is ramped up, only to fire them again when demand falls. They cannot accumulate seniority or improved benefits and many have been hired and fired several times over the last few years.

“Ford believes there is value in employing temporary workers,” Marty Mulloy, the vice president of labor affairs for Ford, which employs about 2,000 such workers, told a reporter. The workers “provide us with increased flexibility as we address the variable needs of our business,” he said, “and the peaks and valleys of our cyclical industry.”

With the summer launch of the Chevrolet Cruze and the addition of a third shift, about 600 temporary workers were hired to work in the Lordstown assembly plant, just

outside Youngstown, Ohio. GM said it would re-evaluate employment numbers in December.

“You work six months and they lay you off. They hire you back for another six months and lay you off again,” said Nate, a young temporary worker at the Lordstown plant.

“There are hardly any unemployment benefits for your family when you are out of work because GM tells the state you weren’t working long enough to get full benefits. I got a letter saying I’m only getting \$150 every two weeks with two children.

“I’m at my wits’ end. Every time you turn around you get laid off. I’m there everyday before starting time, eager and willing to work. I’m tired of being pushed out the door every six months. And I’m not the only one.”

In 2007, the UAW accepted a wage reduction for temporary workers from \$18 an hour to \$14, in line with the introduction of tier-two wages for new hires that are half what traditional workers are paid.

“It’s pretty tricky raising two daughters on \$15.06 an hour pay,” Nate told the WWS. “There’s no way to do it. I’m struggling just to pay my expenses. It’s cost me \$60-80 a week just to drive to work. If I work a 40-hour week, I’m bringing home a \$500 check. My rent is over \$600 a month and then with utilities and groceries you don’t have anything left.”

Temps are only guaranteed 20 hours a week. “If they have problems in the paint department,” Nate said, “they send the temps home and sometimes you only get paid for

four hours that day. In some weeks you can get paid as little as \$200 a week—and, of course, you have to pay union dues out of that. That’s another \$30 a month.”

The UAW does nothing to defend these workers. “You are treated poorly. They ship you where they want. We’re just the poor cousins of the full-time workers in the UAW. You are not treated like union brothers by the UAW reps. They say we hardly have any rights. I asked them, ‘Then why do we pay union dues?’ You can be fired at anytime without any backup from the union.”

Earlier this year a group of 28 temporary workers at the Lordstown plant sued GM and the UAW, alleging the company illegally extended their temporary assignments and the union failed to represent their interests. The plaintiffs said the UAW refused to file grievances and a public review board of the international Union upheld that decision.

In an interview with vindy.com (operated by *The [Youngstown] Vindicator*), UAW Local 1112 President Jim Graham claimed there were no longer any temporary employees at the facility “to his knowledge.” He declined to discuss the process by which employees go from a temporary to a full-time status, a major issue in the lawsuit.

The workers, first hired as temporaries in 2006, were terminated in 2007, and then rehired seven months later as permanent employees with seniority, the suit says. But in June 2008—after the UAW accepted the two-tier wage system—they were forced to accept the status of temporary employees or be terminated immediately. Meanwhile they were forced to take pay cuts of more than 40 percent.

The workers were told their pay would increase when GM hired a third shift. But they received no pay raise when Lordstown added a new shift last year. The 28 workers are seeking \$3 million in back pay and permanent positions with full wages and benefits.

“We have no insurance for medication or a doctor’s visit,” Nate told the WSWS. “My wife is pregnant and she filed for medical care from the state of Ohio. I was glad that she got it for herself and the kids. I have none. I’ve been so sick sometimes, I’m coughing badly on the assembly line.

“Every time you’re laid off they start your seniority time all over again. You get no paid holidays even after 90 days. Last year, was the first time the temps got paid for Christmas. By the time we get ready to retire there won’t be any benefits left. We won’t have the option to retire.”

Nate said he was part of a group of workers hired in 2008 who were told they would be full-time employees. “I looked at my paycheck and saw that I was just a temp. I called the UAW and they said I was just a temp.

Asked if he thought a struggle should be carried out against these conditions, Nate said, “I would enjoy seeing a fight the way GM treats the temps. My dad was part of the wildcat strikes that took place in Lordstown in the 1970s. He told me they were producing 107 cars an hour. Now we’re doing 60. During the wildcat the workers caused as much disruption as they could. Now the UAW is more concerned about the money they collect than the people.”

“Some of us are saying all of the temps should call off one day. Let’s see what they can produce without us. The full-time workers want to help us out.”

The World Socialist Web Site is encouraging GM workers to reject the sellout agreements by the UAW and form rank-and-file committees, independent of the UAW, to spearhead an industrial and political struggle to defend jobs, abolish the two-tier wage system and restore all concessions, including cost of living and pay increases. (See our statement.)

We urge auto workers to contact the WSWS.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

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